

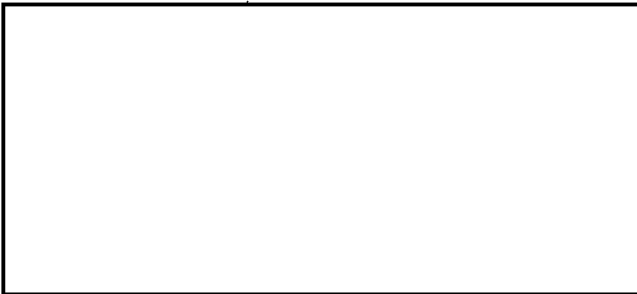
THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

12 August 1981

STAT



This fellow at Notre Dame has views that seem rather similar to yours on Mexico. Perhaps at some point you should be in touch with him to see what he has that backs up the assertions in the letter.

Sincerely,

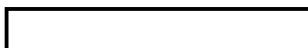
STAT



Henry S. Rowen

Attachment

cc:



C/NIC Chrono ✓

STAT

Wall Street Journal, 12 August 1981

Mexico's Northern Escape Hatch

In response to Mr. Getschow's July 21 page one article on simmering church-state rivalries in Mexico and the likelihood of social conflict, I would add some qualifications:

One needs to take care in making a direct comparison between the religious, political and economic conditions that gave rise to the Cristero Rebellion in 1926 and the present situation. The Cristero Rebellion was a genuine religious conflict: Economic factors alone would not have caused such a destructive and intense conflict.

The Catholics of that region lost the battle but won the religious war. Also, it should be mentioned that the Center-West is stable and relatively prosperous today because — there are other reasons, of course — the unemployed and landless emigrate to the U.S.

The South-West is the most economically depressed and socially volatile area. Among other reasons, this region lacks the escape hatch to the North and is pressured by immigrants from the South. Relative to the rest of Mexico, economic conditions are probably worse now than in the 1920s, and have disintegrated substantially during the past decade. Corruption, violence and the widespread use of troops to repress peasant groups and in one case to destroy an entire village are reported in the newspapers of Mexico City.

The role of the church in the South-West is different from that in any other region. The Catholic Church there is more concerned, informed, nuanced, poor and pre-

cariously perched than in the big cities and in the Center-West. It is more vulnerable to repression from politicians. State governments support evangelicals in their efforts to divide villagers and peasant organizations, claiming that it is God's will that peasants accept their economic and political condition without protests. Mainline Protestants and local Catholic leaders are no longer so easily persuaded — deceived — as in the past by revolutionary myths of repeatedly deferred rewards. Unofficially, the government dismisses popular religion as vulgar superstition — except in those few villages where tourism is needed.

An important factor that distinguishes Mexican development from the rest of Latin America is proximity to the United States. Had not millions of disgruntled and hungry peasants crossed over to the U.S. during the past 30 years, internal pressures on the Mexican political system would have resembled those of Guatemala and the rest of Central America. What then? The isolation and repression of the South-West of Mexico allows comparisons with areas considered stable only a few years ago. This fact alone qualifies the pious assertions that Mexico is uniquely stable among Latin American countries. The uniqueness lies only in the ability of political leaders to conceal the fragility upon which political stability is based.

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